



CITY OF TAUNTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

CHIEF
EDWARD JAMES WALSH

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July 17th, 2020

Dear Chair Aaron Michlewitz and Chair Claire Cronin, please accept the following testimony with regard to SB2820 - An Act to reform police standards and shift resources to build a more equitable, fair and just commonwealth that values Black lives and communities of color.

I am sure that you will receive a lot more articulate and well written letters than mine. I am offering my humble thoughts on the proposed legislation. I have been a police officer for 32 years and chief for ten. I also work as an adjunct professor on criminal justice and am a member of the Massachusetts Bar. I also serve as the General Chair of the International Association of Chiefs of Police Midsized Agencies Division, representing all police agencies with a sworn size between 50 and 999 sworn officers.

We as a society have issues. There is no question of that. Over the last few years, we have become more polarized and entrenched and the middle ground is dissipating. Studies have shown that when deeply held beliefs are challenged with fact that are contrary to the beliefs, that the holder's beliefs become more entrenched. As a student of history, I am listening to the political discourse in this country and it scares me as anyone who disagrees with the popular voice is labeled a racist. I have been told that some members of the Senate who did not totally support the bill voted for it out of fear of being labelled a racist if they did not support it in its entirety. If this is true, we have reached a sad plateau.

It is difficult to have an intelligent and rational conversation on emotionally charged issues with people when the "popular truth" cannot be questioned or challenged. History is replete with examples of this from the French Revolution to the rectification campaign in Chinese Communism in the 1940s. There is "one truth" and everyone who disagrees is cancelled by the arbitrators of the "new truth". This should not be reflective of who we are and we should encourage honest and respectful public discourse and respect the opinions of others.

The issue at the forefront is systematic racism. Policing in our society is but just one part of the overall issue. Simply "reforming the police" will not address the underlying societal issues that often create hostile encounters between police officers and the communities they serve. To have an honest and meaningful change, we need to have real discussions and solutions to the underlying structural issues that create social and economic inequality in our society.

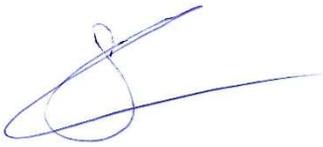
The House is in the process of reviewing the Senate Bill. The Senate Bill was quickly drafted and passed with no input or discussion on the merits or implications of the bill. And while there are some outstanding provisions in the bill, I am concerned about several of the items and the unintended consequences that may result.

Policing in Massachusetts is nationally respected. We are generally at the forefront of the profession and are viewed as progressive. It was Chief Terry Cunningham, as President of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, that came out on the national stage and apologized for the profession's history and treatment of communities of color. This took courage and created a lot of discussion in the profession. By discussing these issues we can better understand the divides and history that separate us.

I, like many chiefs have received numerous requests under the 8cantwait movement and looking at the list befuddled because what we are being asked to change has not been policy in Massachusetts for decades. I am in my fourth decade in policing. There have been many changes during that time and we as a profession continue to evolve. We as chiefs see ourselves as agents of change, but we also see the Senate Bill as a knee jerk reaction to an action by one individual that occurred in another part of the country that does not reflect us locally. We understand the outrage, but we need to be part of the discussion. If we want meaningful change, we must come together to discuss the issues and develop solutions to local problems and not simply legislate in the dark and hope for the best.

I have read the letters written by the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police, Massachusetts Major Cities Chiefs, Bristol County Chiefs, etc. I support their views on the issues and hope that the house has the integrity to openly and seriously discuss the issues and make decisions on a reasonable and rational basis and not simply because of what is popular at the moment.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Edward James Walsh', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Edward James Walsh, Esq.
Chief of Police